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Let's Talk About Detractors

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Every nation, organization, society and even small group has goals of accomplishment, ideals to live up to and a mission it seeks to perform. But every organization and small group has something else. Detractors. They are usually friendly, kindly, social and fun to be with. They're often intellectually bright and more sophisticated than most. They can be the life of the party, the ones who get things going, serve prasada and talk a mile a minute. They make themselves popular, welcomed by every board of trustees and committee, because people feel that their energy and inspiration will implement the objectives of the organization, be it building a temple, promoting a publication, saving the rainforests or reorganizing Hindu society into traditional ways of life, culture and arts.

Their special social skills promote them quickly through the ranks. Once in a controlling position, they speak wisely on subjects irrelevant to the central purpose of the organization. Their interests extend beyond the group's, and they seek to turn all minds in their direction. Given a chance, they can turn a not-so-wealthy ashram into an up-and-coming business, diluting the original holy impulse of selfless, humble service. Of course, they do perform some worships, just enough to keep them in with a religious group. Given a project, they may delay a mailing to the point that when it arrives it is useless, or refrain from doing it at all. They are never without a good reason for their actions, having been educated in the venerable book of excuses. At meetings they are quite competent to tell, in voluptuous terms, why a project all wish to manifest is not possible. They are equally capable of making everyone question the mission, the organization and their part in it. They politic to redefine the group's chartered purpose, make it fit into their ideas. These rajas of reason have many ruses to discourage others from fitting in, and will go to great efforts to bring up irrelevant alternatives and possibilities which cloud the group's thinking and undermine its commitments.

These, my friends, are detractors. Far from being useful, they must be guided by asuric forces, which seek to undermine, erode and create confusion. Detractors also endeavor to control and then stifle the religious leaders-the swamis, pundits, priests and the guru-by setting schedules as to whom they should or should not meet, what they should say and not say. If they can, they will cleverly edit an institution's works into oblivion and make the founder a feeble figurehead, a picture hanging on the wall. These detractors are something to be deeply concerned about.

Don't hope that they will one day turn around and be defenders of faith. By divine dharmic law devotees who are dedicated to the goals of their group are wrong to associate with detractors who seek to replace the religious agenda with a social one. Rather, see them as foes to the forces of dharma, antagonists who do not allow others to preserve the thrust of their founder's goals. Every group should firmly test each one within it to determine who is vowed to fulfill the goals of the organization or who will fight them every step of the way and politic to cause others to do the same, resist and refuse to fit in fully. Their mode of operation is the erosion method, taking up time-even if it's only five minutes today and eight minutes tomorrow. Their presence is always a burden, as they deter, delay, inhibit the mission by their remarkable irrelevancies and intolerable subtle obstinacy.

I'm not saying these are all bad people, though some are there to intentionally infiltrate, dilute and destroy. Others may have, in their own minds, perfectly good intentions. They are entirely unaware of their effect on a group, but that does not excuse them. It is important to mention that for religious service to be effective there must be absolute group harmony for words to go deep and lives to be changed. Everyone's pranas must be flowing together on an equal wavelength. Each must be kindred in their vows and unified in their determination to fulfill the ashram or mission goals.

The big question remains: how to get rid of detractors once they are discovered. Very probably they have made many friends, are tied into key projects and may have contributed a great deal of money and gained a position of control. Religious organizations cannot tolerate domination by wealthy or influential patrons or members who do not support one hundred percent the shared goals. An indigent widow's single rupee in the hundi or a billionaires's one million should have equal weight in the minds of the trustees. If detractors are found, don't confront them. Don't accuse. Don't try to convince them to be different. Quietly let them go their way, into another group. Without them, the mission will soar.